



Acton Dog Parks Public Forum

June 25, 2018

Introductions

- ▶ Acton's Dog Park Committee members:
 - ▶ Clare Siska, Chair
 - ▶ Tom Gillispie, Vice-chair
 - ▶ Fred Kinch
 - ▶ Karen Martin
 - ▶ Mike Perry
- ▶ Under the guidance of:
 - ▶ Joan Gardner, BoS liaison
 - ▶ Matt Selby, Director of Land Use and Economic Development
 - ▶ Tom Tidman, Natural Resources Director
 - ▶ The Acton Recreation & Land Use departments

Tonight's Forum

- Why dog parks?
- Committee efforts to date
- Our site proposals
- Your input and ideas
- Next steps
- How you can help



Why dog parks?

Who benefits from dog parks?

- Dogs
 - Socialization
 - Exercise
 - Learning from other dogs
 - “A tired dog is a happy dog.”
 - Reduced dog-on-dog aggression

Who benefits from dog parks?

- Dog Owners
 - Opportunities to be outside and exercise
 - Interact with other dog owners
 - Common interests foster supportive relationships
 - Learn responsible dog ownership skills
 - Share ideas, insights, and supplies
 - Apartment and condo-dwellers without yards can give their dogs an opportunity to run free

Who benefits from dog parks?

➤ The Community

- Fewer dogs surrendered to shelters
- Reduced incidents of dog aggression towards humans
- Dog parks attract new home buyers
- Therapeutic benefits of being around dogs
 - Disabled ➤ Children
 - Depressed ➤ Elderly
 - Isolated ➤ Anyone!
- Users spend money at nearby, local businesses

Acton's Dog Population

- In the last 5 years, Acton has averaged 2,000 licensed dogs annually, or ~ 1 dog for every 10 residents.
- Some owners use existing Town open spaces to exercise their dogs off-leash, but not all dogs are suited for off-leash outings:
 - Puppies
 - Blind, deaf, aging, or physically impaired dogs
 - Dogs in training
 - Certain breeds
- Shared-use areas, such as Acton Arboretum and Great Hill, can foster tensions between dog owners and non-dog-owners.

Communities recognize the value of dog parks

- ▶ The [Trust for Public Land](#)'s 2015 city parks survey documented 774 dog parks in existence in the United States.
- ▶ Off-leash dog parks led the pack in new urban parks, growing by 4 percent in 2015 and 89 percent since 2007.
- ▶ While the exact number of dog parks in Massachusetts is undocumented, [BringFido.com](#) lists over 80 such parks across the Commonwealth and growing.
- ▶ In a 2017 ADPC survey, 78% of respondents supported the creation of a dog park in Acton.

Massachusetts Dog Parks

- | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| ■ Abington | ■ Danvers | ■ Holyoke | ■ Orange |
| ■ Agawam | ■ Dartmouth | ■ Kingston | ■ Peabody |
| ■ Arlington | ■ Dedham | ■ Leominster | ■ Provincetown |
| ■ Attleboro | ■ Dennis | ■ Lowell | ■ Randolph |
| ■ Ayer | ■ Dorchester | ■ Lynn | ■ Rockport |
| ■ Billerica | ■ Egremont | ■ Mashpee | ■ Salem |
| ■ Boston | ■ Fall River | ■ Maynard | ■ Sharon |
| ■ Brighton | ■ Fitchburg | ■ Medford | ■ Somerville |
| ■ Brookline | ■ Franklin | ■ Melrose | ■ Waltham |
| ■ Burlington | ■ Gloucester | ■ Millbury | ■ Watertown |
| ■ Cambridge | ■ Grafton | ■ Nahant | ■ Westfield |
| ■ Charlestown | ■ Granby | ■ Natick | ■ Weymouth |
| ■ Chelmsford | ■ Greenfield | ■ New Bedford | ■ Wrentham |
| ■ Chestnut Hill | ■ Hanover | ■ Newburyport | ■ Yarmouth |

... and more. Why not Acton?

Acton Recreational Facilities

- 7 playgrounds
- 3 baseball diamonds
- 3 community gardens
- 2 soccer fields
- 2 softball diamonds
- 2 cricket fields
- 1 basketball court
- 1 skate park
- 1 campground
- 2 theaters
- Over 1,700 acres of conservation lands and walking trails
- NARA park with its beach, picnic pavilions, Miracle Field, and amphitheater
- **0 dog parks**



Committee Efforts to Date

Making the Case

- Acton's Dog Park Committee was appointed in August 2017 by Board of Selectmen in response to community requests, and charged with justifying the need.
- Reviewed research
- Community outreach
 - Surveys
 - Discussions with town committees
 - Public events
 - Newspapers, Acton TV and Social Media
 - Meetings with dog park representatives from neighboring towns
- January, 2018 BoS accepts justification, directs committee to identify funding and possible locations from municipal lands

Finding the Money

- Substantial grant funding available from the [Stanton Foundation](#)
- Community Preservation Funds have been used by other towns to fund dog parks (Recreation category)
- Some fundraising will be required
- Possible increase dog license fees to provide an annual maintenance budget
 - \$2 per license @ 2K dogs = \$4K annually

Finding the Right “Spot”

- From research, community conversations, and observation of other dog parks, defined location considerations:
 - Size
 - Terrain
 - Drainage
 - Shade & shelter
 - Convenient access
 - Sufficient parking
 - Safety
 - Potable water source
 - Access to trails
 - Walkability
 - Fresh water access
 - Avoid:
 - Tree clearing
 - Impact on sensitive environments
 - Dense residential areas
 - Use conflicts
- Investigated 13 possible sites from available municipal lands
- Reached out to the community for feedback



Site Proposals

Our Proposal: Neighborhood Parks

- Three neighborhood parks:
 - South, Central, and North Acton
 - Options for all areas of town
 - Reduces the demand on any one location
- The sites:
 - South Acton: Great Hill Field enhancements, target 2020
 - Central Acton: 348 & 352 Main Street, target 2022
 - North Acton: Site TBD, target 2024

Great Hill Field Advantages

- Informal dog park of Acton
- Swimming pond for dogs
- Large, flat, open space
- Designated for recreation
- Abuts Great Hill trails
- No known environmental impact
- No tree clearing required
- 10 existing, paved designated parking spaces
- Sidewalk and vehicle access
- Town water available at School Street

Great Hill Field Enhancements

- Leave the majority of the area open for those who prefer open space
- Fence in an enclosed area to provide owners and dogs more options
- Add:
 - ADA-accessible trail from parking area
 - Additional seating
 - Shade trees and structures
 - Additional dog waste stations
 - Water fountains
 - Fencing at the parking area to improve safety
- Target: Summer, 2020

Great Hill Field Preliminary Design

- Great Hill Preliminary Engineering Sketches:
 - [Neighborhood View](#)
 - [Close-up View](#)

348 & 352 Main Street Advantages

- Suitable size & appropriate terrain
- Undeveloped space in need of a purpose
- Site of the future septic field for Acton Housing Authority housing development limits use potential
- Town retains control over use of these two parcels in the AHA purchase agreement
- Proximity for AHA residents is a win-win
- Easily accessed from multiple locations
- Gateway site: Beautifies first view from Rt 2 exit
- Sidewalk and vehicle access
- Town water available
- Cleared land; no known environmental impact

348 & 352 Main Street Proposal

- Create two separate, enclosed areas for small and all dogs
- Design to include:
 - ADA-accessible trails
 - Aesthetically appropriate fencing
 - Seating
 - Shade trees and structures
 - Dog waste stations
 - Water fountains
- Complete sidewalk from Rt 2 to AHA development
- Target: 2022

348 & 352 Main Street Parcels



348 & 352 Main Street Now



348 & 352 Main Street Future?



North Acton

- ▀ Locations to be considered in the future
- ▀ Services the north side of town
- ▀ Lessons learned from building the first two parks will help inform our direction and decisions
- ▀ Target: 2024

Concerns

- We have heard, and anticipate concerns, regarding:
 - Noise / Barking
 - Cost / Funding
 - Maintenance
 - Sanitation
 - Traffic
 - Parking
 - Safety
 - Light Pollution
 - “Not in my back yard”
- To overcome these and any other obstacles, we will
 - Continue to work with the town, users and neighbors
 - Learn from the experiences of other towns
 - Maintain an open dialogue



Questions? Comments?

Next Steps

- Summer-Fall 2019:
 - Revisit plans based on community feedback
 - Seek Board of Selectmen approval
 - Preliminary designs
 - Fundraising
- Fall-Winter 2019-2020 – Focus: Great Hill
 - Grant applications & allocation
 - Designer selected; design work
 - Additional fundraising
 - Bidding process / select contractor(s)
 - Commence Great Hill improvements Spring 2020

How you can help

- Letters of support to BoS, ADPC and CPC
- Help form a “Friends of...” group
- Stay informed!
- Volunteers needed; experience in:
 - Grant writing
 - Landscape design
 - Fundraising
 - Construction
 - Public relations / social media
 - Project management
 - ADA accessibility

Acton's Dogs and Dog Lovers...

Thank you!!!

